David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. Pp. 946.

Today, less than 20 percent of the American population claim British ancestry. But in a cultural sense, most Americans are Albion's seed, no matter who their own forebears may have been. Albion was the first recorded name for the island of Britain, which was known to the Greeks in the 6th century B.C. as the "island of the Albiones." In the 19th century, romantic poets made Albion into an ornate alias for England rather than Britain, which was its original meaning.

Albion's Seed is the first volume in a series on the cultural history of the United States. This book focuses on the problem of cultural origins, in an anthropological rather than an aesthetic sense. The author, historian David Hackett Fischer, begins with his definition of "folkways," a term coined by the American sociologist, William Graham Sumner, to describe habitual "ways, manners, customs, mores and morals" which he believed to be primarily biological and instinctual in origin. Fischer's definition embraces the social and intellectual aspects of "folkways" which he qualifies as being cultural artifacts, not necessarily very old, always in flux and belonging to both advanced and primitive civilizations. Fischer's argument, in a nutshell, states that from 1629 to 1775, North America was settled by four great waves of English-speaking immigrants. The first was an exodus of Puritans from the east of England to Massachusetts Bay (1629-40). The second was the movement of a Royalist elite and their indentured servants from the south of England to Virginia (1640-75). The third was the Quakers' migration from the North Midlands of England and Wales to the Delaware Valley (1675-1725). The fourth was a flight from the borderlands of North Britain and northern Ireland to the American back-country (1717-25).

These four groups differed in religion, rank, generation, and place of origin. They all spoke the English language but had different dialects. They also differed in their vernacular architectural traditions, ideas of family and marriage, attitudes toward gender and sexuality, rituals of worship and magic, forms of work and play, establishment of education and literacy, and practices of child-rearing. More importantly, they had four different concepts of order, power and freedom — differences which help explain the development of expansive pluralism in modern America.

Albion's Seed is a fascinating and detailed study of four different cultures. Its style is anecdotal and eloquent, its tone moderate and informed, its scope wide-ranging and inclusive. A look at just the chapter on the Puritans alone will confirm the scholarly aptitude of its author. Beginning in the same key as Bar-

bara Tuchman's *A Final Salute*, Fischer moves from the description of a ship at anchor with its guns in action, to a cinematographic panning of its passengers, to a close-up study of the implications of and reasons for the Puritans' voluntary exodus to their new Eden. The great migration of 80,000 Puritans was, in effect, a flight from intolerable conditions resulting from the "eleven years' tyranny" when Charles I tried to rule England without a Parliament, and Archbishop William Laud purged the Anglican church of its Puritan members. The first 21,000 English migrants who came to Massachusetts in 1630-40 increased in number to 100,000 by 1700, to one million by 1800, six million by 1900 and more than sixteen million by 1988. The Puritans adhered to what is known as the five points of Calvinism: the notion of inherent depravity, the ideas of covenant, election, grace and love. These doctrines became tremendously important to the culture of New England. For instance, the notion of the covenanted family meant a strong nuclear family unit and a respect for hierarchy of age. The latter was written into Massachusetts law in 1648, in the form of an advocation of the death penalty as a punishment for stubborn or rebellious sons over the age of 16 who refused to obey either parent! No child was ever executed under this law but several "errant" children (some in their 40s) were fined or whipped for being abusive. The Puritan cult of age veneration was also reflected in the practice of age-heaping, with a bias towards old age. It was also normal for tithingmen to inspect families. The Puritan concept of the nuclear family contrasts with the Virginian "extended" family and open hospitality system which included all who slept under the same roof, be it friends, relatives, or servants.

Religion coloured all aspects of life. The Puritan landscape was one where Cotton Mather's exhortation took root in firm soil. "Geography," wrote Mather, "must now find work for Christianography." Scriptural guidance dictated daily living in the Massachusetts Bay Colony where even the standard size of a barrel of beer was set according to a rule in the Book of Deuteronomy. There was a high marriage rate of 94 percent for women and 98 percent for men because there was a strong marriage imperative; women who did not marry by 30 were called "thornbacks" in Massachusetts, as in England. Apparently, Puritans also suspected that failure to marry was a sign of God's ill favor. Marriage was a civil contract, and actual gender inequality was translated into spiritual equality in "the soul's vocation," aptly summarized in Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "He for God only, She for God in Him." Yet sex among the Puritans was far from being puritanical in the popular sense. John Cotton, a founding father, wrote that "women are creatures without which there is no comfortable living for man: it is true of them what to be said of governments, that bad ones are better than none."

Sexual attitudes evinced a strong encouragement of sexual love (but never on a Sunday!) and sensual bonds within marriage, strict punishment of fornication and adultery, a maniacal horror of unnatural sex, and rigid taboos against contraception within marriage (a practice unique to New England). Child-rearing involved will-breaking (somewhat similar to the "breaking" of a horse) and sending out children near the age of puberty to enforce discipline. Death ways involved the inculcation of an attitude of cultivated insecurity: in order to be sure, one had to be unsure. Deathlore meant forcing children to stare death in the face (literally making them confront death in open graves) and a "daily dying" ritual for adults, which meant wild swings between hope and despair. There was a prevalent sense of nostalgia, anxiety and loss among the Puritans; their voluntary "banishment" from their mother country led to the development of a conservative cultural attitude. Physically, the Puritans exhibited a certain lean and hungry look—not an uncommon result of austere food habits and discouragement of sensual indulgence. They were the earliest Americans to associate plain cooking with piety and vegetables. Their "canonical dish" was "pease porridge." Those of us who remember the popular nursery rhyme: "Pease porridge hot, / Pease porridge cold, / Pease porridge in the pot, / Nine days old" will find the Puritan penchant for peas highly illuminating.

Fischer's anecdotal illustrations are very helpful in explaining, not only cultural origins, but also literary origins of common stock phrases. The term, "upper crust," for example, has its roots in the immortal "rye n' injun" mixture (comprising rye flour and cornmeal) which nourished New Englanders for many generations. This combination produced a bread crust so hard that it could be used in place of a spoon to scoop up the beans; hence the term, "upper crust." Fischer also relates an anecdote about the rocking chair: one visitor to New England remarked that the elders invented the rocking chair so that they could keep moving even while sitting still! Apparently, the vigorous, healthy, invigorating climate and a challenging and rewarding land were responsible for Arnold Toynbee's choice of New England as the classic example of a "hard country" which stimulated its inhabitants to high achievements through a process of "challenge and response." Interestingly enough, the climate was not conducive to Africans so that slave labor was not popular.

In the section on architectural style, Fischer mentions that houses were built, facing south. In a later section on Massachusetts time ways, he explains why as he elaborates on the Puritan notion of "improving the time" (Boston-born Franklin Roosevelt wrote in 1748: "Remember that *time* is money[9]"). It was the Puritan, Ralph Thoresby, who invented the alarm clock in 1680 to enable him to wake up early so as to have more time for God. But since clocks were expensive in the 17th century, New Englanders improvised by turning their houses into timepieces. Massachusetts homes were often "sunline houses," which faced due south on a noon sighting. The facade of the house was even made into a giant sundial, with hours carved into the facing-boards around the door.

In a systematic analysis of the folkways of the four British cultures that migrated to North America, Fischer highlights the differences. The Puritan egalitarian attitude towards literacy (which resulted in a strong support for public schools and higher learning to preserve cultural heritage) contrasts with the Virginian elitist attitude (which viewed literacy as an instrument of wealth and power). Similarly, the Virginian attitude towards dancing (it was compelled as a ritual of self-restraint and manners) diverged from the Quaker exhortation against dancing (it was perceived as the Devil's trap). Children in Massachusetts were named after Biblical characters whereas they were named after Teutonic warriors, Frankish knights and English kings in Virginia.

One could go on recounting the endless wonders and delights of discovery on reading Albion's Seed. Suffice to say that Fischer's book is an invaluable contribution to American social and cultural anthropology as well as a well-documented source for background reading for a more comprehensive understanding of 18th- and 19th-century American literature. The author delivers what he promises. He manages to explain, through his examination of four British folkways in America, the origins and stability of a social system which, for two centuries, has remained stubbornly democratic in its politics, capitalist in its economy, libertarian in its laws, individualist in its society and pluralistic in its culture. One can only look forward to the succeeding volumes in Fischer's series on American historiography.

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